## INDIA'S ECOMARK

### Introduction

As part of an effort to improve environmental quality and to increase environmental awareness among industries and consumers, the Indian Parliament initiated a voluntary ecolabeling program known as the Ecomark in February 1991. The Ecomark is a government operated seal-of-approval program for environmentally-preferable consumer products. The Ministry of Environment of Forests (MoEF), with the technical advice of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), manages the program. Unlike many other international ecolabeling programs that are independent, India's Ecomark is tied with the BIS's product quality standards. In order to be Ecomark certified, products must meet these product quality standards, as well as product-specific environmental criteria set by the Ecomark program. In meeting Ecomark requirements, manufacturers will also have both the BIS's quality standards label on their products.

The objectives of the Ecomark program are fivefold: 1) to provide manufacturers and importers an incentive to reduce the adverse environmental impacts of their products, 2) to reward genuine initiatives by companies to reduce the adverse environmental impacts of their products, 3) to assist consumers in becoming environmentally responsible in their daily lives by providing them with information on environmental impacts that they can incorporate in their purchasing decisions, 4) to encourage citizens to purchase products that have fewer environmental impacts, and 5) to ultimately improve the quality of the environment and encourage sustainable management of resources.

The Ecomark label is seen as a "movement of consumers" and is therefore given exclusively to consumer products. Interestingly, even though (as of January 1997) sixteen product categories had been selected for the Ecomark, only one product, in the detergent product category, has been awarded the Ecomark. So far, however, there are no products available on the market with the ecolabel; the manufacturer of the detergent product that had been awarded the Ecomark did not market the product with the ecolabel. According to Dr. Sudhir K. Ghosh, Member Secretary of the Ecomark Technical Committee, "Indian industries are not coming forward to get eco-certification of their products, though they are involved in the process of criteria development." Some attribute this to the costs involved in applying for the Ecomark and the numerous regulatory requirements manufacturers must meet before being awarded the ecolabel. Other reasons may include industries' concerns about the Ecomark program, which are outlined below.

### Recent Developments

The program reports that there have been no significant changes in the methodology for determining award criteria since the beginning of the program. Due to the lack of response from manufactures (and consumers) regarding ecolabeling, however, the Ministry of Environments and Forests has recently (August 1997) launched a market survey for ecolabeled products.

## Program Summary

There are three committees involved with product category selection, criteria development, and award of the Ecomark. First, an inter-ministerial Steering Committee in the Ministry of Environment & Forests determines the product categories to which an Ecomark may be granted. The Committee is also in charge of promoting of the labeling scheme to manufacturers and consumers. Once the Steering Committee has made proposals for product categories, a Technical Committee in the Central Pollution Control Board determines the specific product to be included under the Ecomark scheme.

The Technical Committee is the central committee for the Ecomark scheme and constitutes sub-committees for the development of Ecomark criteria for each proposed product category. The Technical Committee provides technical assistance and recommendations to the Steering Committee for finalizing product categories, and is also in charge of developing product specific criteria, based on life-cycle assessments, wherever possible. Once criteria are finalized, the Bureau of Indian Standards and/or the Directorate of Marketing translates the product criteria into Indian Standards, assesses and certifies the products, and coordinates (via testing and contractual arrangements) with manufacturers wishing to use the Ecomark label on their products.

Manufacturers wishing to obtain the license to use the Ecomark label on their products submit applications to the Bureau of Indian Standards and deposit a non-refundable fee approximately Rs. 500 ($14.00 US) for each product. The applicant is responsible for any testing and inspection costs, if required. In addition there is a usage fee, based on the annual production of the product, which is determined by the BIS. If the manufacturer is found to be in compliance with the award criteria, the BIS draws up a contract for use of the Ecomark. The label is initially granted for one year, but there is the option to renew the license for the Ecomark label for a fee of Rs. 300 ($8.30 US). If a manufacturer illegally uses the Ecomark, without BIS certification, they are subject to punishment as per provision of the Bureau of Indian Standards Act of 1986.

## Program Methodology

Once specific products are selected for the Ecomark, product criteria are developed. In general, previous literature and other programs' life-cycle assessments are used in conducting a simplified life-cycle assessment that examines products in terms of their main environmental impacts. These include: the product's potential for generating less pollution than other comparable products; whether the product is recycled, recyclable, or made from recycled materials or whether it is biodegradable; and whether it makes significant contributions to saving non-renewable resources. Products are assessed specifically on their use, potential for reuse and recyclability, environmental impact during final disposal, and their ingredients or their materials restrictions. India, however, does not follow SETAC guidelines in its LCA. The Ecomark Technical Committee may also plan

to incorporate the International Standards Organization (ISO) 14020 guidelines and general principles once these are finalized. Draft criteria are peer-reviewed and peer-review critiques are available to the public.

Furthermore, certain general requirements have to be met in order to grant the Ecomark label. First, products must meet the Bureau of Indian Standard's product quality, safety, and performance standards. Second, manufacturers of the product must provide evidence that they are in compliance with India's Water, Air, and Environmental Protection Acts and, if applicable, with the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act of 1954 and the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940. Third, the product must display a list of all the critical ingredients in descending order of quantity present. Fourth, the manufacturer may opt to display (on the packaging) the criteria upon which the Ecomark label is based. Fifth, instructions on the product's proper use, performance, and disposal may be shown on the product's packaging as well.

### Other Information

The overall response to the Ecomark program within India itself has been quite limited and manufacturers are hesitant to apply for the Ecomark label. Several factors are seen as possible causes for this hesitation. First, the Ecomark scheme is a self-financing program, requiring manufacturers to pay for the application, testing, licensing fee, and renewal costs involved in certification. Some estimates indicate that these costs can amount to a 10 percent increase in a manufacturer's production costs -- which are not guaranteed to be returned in increased profits. Second, products have to comply to BIS's quality standards before being able to apply for the Ecomark. The BIS standards add another layer of regulation and approvals for manufacturers, which are perceived as a burden with few immediate benefits.

Additionally, industry has complained that India's Ecomark has not done enough to involve it in product criteria development. Industry feels the Indian Government has "rushed through" with the Ecomark. Industry feels that the labeling program will not help environmental improvement if criteria concentrate on single issues, or if they are based on other programs that do not take the local situation into account. Industry also says that the labeling program inhibits innovation that comes with consumer goods production and can, therefore, be a hindrance to environmental improvements. Finally, industry feels that because of the lack of consumer awareness of environmentally preferable products, the Ecomark program may send consumers the "wrong" message by indicating to consumers that non-Ecomark labeled products are not environmentally safe.

Indian exporters feel that many of the product categories chosen for Ecomark, with the exception of textiles and certain food items, do not reflect India's major export products for which an Ecomark might be of value. Several manufacturers have, in fact, adopted the ecolabeling standards of their importing customers' countries in order to operate in those markets. The textile and leather products sectors (two of India's largest exports) have made efforts to conform to ecolabeling standards in EU countries such as Denmark and Germany. Such conformance has been possible

through bilateral support from these foreign governments. In response, the Indian Government is now in the process of developing award criteria for the leather and leather products categories.

With regard to trade, the Indian Ecomark program does recognize the increasing popularity of ecolabeling schemes around the world, and the Ecomark Steering Committee recognizes that, "whilst there is a need for greater transparency, voluntary ecolabeling schemes should not be brought under the scope of the technical barriers to trade agreements." As a result, the Indian Government stresses that the Ecomark program is a "purely voluntary scheme open to all manufacturers, both domestic and foreign." According to the Ecomark Technical Committee, in order to make the scheme more globally transparent, much of the information on the Ecomark can be found on the World Wide Web (http://www.nic.in/envfor/cpcb/cpcb.html). The site was created by the Central Pollution Control Board in collaboration with the National Information Centre in India.

The Indian government has already prohibited the handling of 70 "azo" dyes, in response to new regulations by Germany and the EU in place as of early 1996. About 70 percent of dyes manufactured and used in textiles in India contain 'azo' dyes, and about 25 percent (190) of these have been banned in Germany and the EU. Germany and the EU are two of India's largest markets for garments and textiles (10 percent of India's textiles and textile goods exports go to Germany and 50 percent are sold to the EU as a whole). These new regulations are likely to affect India's exports in these sectors.

To help exporters understand these new regulations, the Indian Government has set up committees in charge of information dissemination to trade and industry, legal measures, research and development, and identification of substitutes. The committees have asked trade and research associations, export promotion councils, state governments, and other textiles-related organizations, to produce outreach materials (e.g., pamphlets, leaflets, publications, videos, advertisements in daily publications, workshops, and seminars), in both English and local languages, to provide manufacturers with information regarding the regulations.

India's Ministry of Environment and Forests has issued restrictions on manufacturing of the 190 banned dyes, as well as placing these dyes on a list of restricted imports under India's Export-Import policy. In addition, a provision in the Textiles (Development and Regulations) Order of 1993 will be included specifying which toxic or harmful dyes and chemicals should not be used in the manufacturing of textiles. In addition, a list of the banned dyes, a list of safe substitutes, product related eco-standards, and a list of guidelines for manufacturing environmentally preferable textiles have been distributed.

The Department of Chemical Technology at the University of Bombay, the Technology Institute of Textiles and Sciences, and other research institutions are requested to identify toxic chemicals and dyes to be phased out from textile manufacturing. Additionally, numerous laboratories have been set up throughout textile centers in the country to perform tests on the banned dyes and to find possible alternatives.

Finally, in an effort to achieve harmonization and mutual recognition with other ecolabeling programs, the Indian Ministry of Commerce presented a paper at the "Seminar on Trade Effects of Eco-labelling" in Bangkok, Thailand, in early 1997. The Ministry suggested forming an organization, called the Asian Environmental Network (AEN), similar to the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) but specifically for the Asia Pacific region. They proposed that AEN could be set up for better exchange and dissemination of information about ecolabeling, and to work toward greater harmonization among ecolabeling programs in Asia. The Ministry of Commerce suggested that AEN could set up generic ecolabeling standards for the Asia Pacific Region, as well as provide technical assistance to countries trying to further develop or who are trying to set-up ecolabeling programs. Also, information on mutual recognition, equivalency, new technologies, new products, and regional protocols could be disseminated via a newsletter or on the Internet. AEN is still in the development stages, however, and has not yet been formally established.

### References


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**Product Categories**

*Final Categories*

Soaps and detergents
Paper
Food items
Lubricating oils
Packaging materials/packages
Architectural paints and powder coatings
Batteries
Electrical/electronic goods
Food Additives
Wood substitutes
Cosmetics
Aerosols Propellants
Plastic Products
Textiles

*Categories Under Development*

Leather and Leather products
Fire extinguishers
Household pesticides